

MUSIC APPRECIATION SECTION**GREAT COMPOSERS OF MUSIC**

By BERT PAUL OSBON *

VI. MENDELSSOHN, THE HAPPY COMPOSER

*Felix Mendelssohn*

FELIX MENDELSSOHN is one of music's happiest characters. Unlike most other composers, he was never in want, and never had to battle with the world for recognition.

He was another boy wonder; like Mozart and

Beethoven, when a boy Mendelssohn was a musical prodigy. (See the article *Mozart, the Boy Prodigy* in the May, 1940, issue of THE YOUNG CITIZEN; also the article *Beethoven, Musical Genius* in the July, 1940, issue of THE YOUNG CITIZEN.)

His father was a wealthy Jewish banker of Hamburg, Germany, where Felix was born in 1809. Together with his two sisters and a brother he was given music lessons by his talented mother, and at the age of ten years could play works of the great composers.

The parents of this boy named him Felix, which, as you may know, means "happy." Never was a boy better named, for no boy ever had a happier childhood.

Felix and his brothers and sisters had everything that could make children happy.

Before Mendelssohn was three years old, the family moved to Berlin. When he was older, Felix often played the piano for visitors, always most willingly. Sometimes he played duets with his sister Fanny who was also a fine pianist. As he grew older, his skill as a musician increased, and the fame of his genius spread everywhere.

Felix was the most affectionate child you can imagine, and he especially loved his sister Fanny. A great artist has painted a picture of Mendelssohn as a youth at the piano with his sister Fanny. A copy of this painting is used as an illustration of this article. (See page 303.)

Mendelssohn was fortunate in his family, for the Mendelssohn family was one of wealth and education. Their home in Berlin was a gathering place for people of literary and musical tastes. The Mendelssohn children were encouraged to take part in the musical programs given every week in the delightful music-room of the Mendelssohn house.

When Felix was seventeen years old, he and his brothers and sisters acted the charming fairy play of the great Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and for the performance this gifted young man composed some wonderful fairy music which even now is often heard. It was for this play that the youthful Mendelssohn wrote his famous overture called

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Overture to A Midsummer Night's Dream. In this composition one hears the silver trumpets announcing the fairies, music for the dancing of the fairies, the braying of the donkey of the play—all very delightfully and cleverly arranged. You should hear this music when you have an opportunity. If you like, you can buy a phonograph record of this lovely overture.

One of the finest and best known of Mendelssohn's compositions which he wrote in later life is his oratorio *Elijah*.

An oratorio, is a long composition to be sung by soloists and a chorus with accompaniment by an orchestra. Sometimes the accompaniment is played on an organ or a piano. The words are generally taken from the Bible and set forth some Biblical story. In the oratorio *Elijah* the composer gives, in vocal form, a narration, in part, of the life of the famous Old Testament prophet Elijah.

You may have heard also of those beautiful short piano compositions by Mendelssohn which he called *Songs without Words*. The composer used this simple title for a large number of short compositions for the piano. Each one is like a bit of poetry or a delicate picture in tone. Some bear suggestive names, but your imagination completes the meaning. Perhaps the best known of Mendelssohn's

Songs without Words is his exquisite *Spring Song*. You should hear that also, either by phonograph or on the piano.

Mendelssohn also wrote many other compositions such as *concertos*, symphonies, songs, and oratorios.

He was an excellent pianist and organist, and a good viola player. He had a very pleasing manner, and was fond of gaiety and fun. He was kind and thoughtful, high-minded and generous. He was always a religious man, and this characteristic gave his sacred compositions a

high quality.

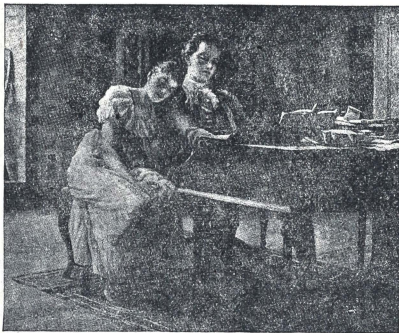
In 1847 his beloved sister Fanny died suddenly. The shock broke him down, and after a few months he, also, died.

Mendelssohn ranks as one of the world's most beloved composers. His music takes you back to the days of Bach and Handel. (See the January, 1940, and

the February, 1940, issue of THE YOUNG CITIZEN.) It was Mendelssohn who discovered the old forgotten music manuscripts of Bach. He wanted the people of his time to like Bach's music, some of which had not been heard for a hundred years. So he began a plan of having concerts of the compositions of "the father of modern music." In that way Bach's music was revived; never again will it be forgotten.

The music of Mendelssohn is dignified,

(Please turn to page 314.)



Mendelssohn and His Sister Fanny

REWARD FOR HONESTY

(Continued from page 294)

As she said this, Doña Elena noticed the cheerful appearance of Macaria and the smile on her rather pretty features. A thought came to her.

"Macaria," said Doña Elena, "I am needing a new maid. Dolores, my maid at present, is getting married soon, and will leave me. So I must find some one capable of taking her place. I believe that with a little training you could take her place. I must have someone who is honest, and you have just shown that you have that desirable qualification. Will you come?"

"Oh, Doña Elena, thank you very, very much," answered Macaria, and tears came to her eyes. "I would love to come and be in this beautiful home, and serve you. But my mother. She would be alone at home. I cannot leave her."

Then Don Ambrosio spoke. "I think we can fix that. We need an *amah* to look after our two small children. It would be easy work, and I think your mother could look after the children splendidly."

"Thank you, thank you, Don Ambrosio and Doña Elena," said the grateful girl. "I think mother would be very happy to care for

the children."

So Macaria hastened home to tell to her mother the good news.

"Mother, mother, see! I have a twenty-peso bill, all my own! Now I can buy new shoes and a new dress! And mother, that is only the beginning. I am to be the maid for Doña Elena, and live in their beautiful home on the hill. And Oh, mother! You are to live there too, and look after little Pepito and Carling. Isn't it just wonderful!"

The poor mother cried for joy, for now they need not suffer any more nor be in want. There was work for both of them—delightful, agreeable work. And a nice home, and pleasant surroundings.

"Let us thank God for our good fortune," said the mother.

"Mother," said Macaria, "it has certainly paid to be honest. I remembered the words of my teacher, 'Better be poor and honest than rich with shame,' and so I returned the twenty-peso bill to Don Ambrosio. And this good fortune is the result."

In a few days mother and daughter were settled in their new home and had learned their new duties.

"Macaria," said the mother one day, "how hap-

MENDELSSOHN

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like church music, yet because of its fine style it is like concert music too. Be sure to hear and learn to love the music of this happy composer—the music of youth, of spring, of fairies, and of flowers.

A REVIEW

1. How was Mendelssohn's life different from that of other composers?

2. How was he like Mozart and Beethoven as a boy?

3. Tell of his father.

4. Who was his first music teacher?

5. What could he do at the age of ten years?

6. What was his first name? What does it mean? How was it suitable?

7. Where did the family go to live?

8. What did Felix and his sister Fanny do?

9. How did he regard his sister Fanny?

10. Tell of the Mendelssohn home in Berlin.

11. Tell all you can about Mendelssohn's music.

py we are now!"

"Yes, indeed!" said Macaria.

"And this, my dear Macaria," continued her mother, "this is your reward for honesty."